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The Mission of the Friends.

A Bi-Centennial Sermon.

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THE MISSION OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

A SERMON

SUGGESTED BY THE

BI-CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE LANDING

OF

WILLIAM PENN,

DELIVERED IN THE MEETING HOUSE OF THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA,

OCTOBER 22D, 1882.

By GEORGE DANA BOARDMAN,

Pastor.

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The Mission of the Society of Friends.

There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.—I Corinthians xi. 19.

Meaning of the word translated "Heresy."

The word here translated "heresy" primarily meant "a taking, conquering": then it came to mean "choice, preference": then it came to mean "the thing chosen," as, an opinion, doctrine, way of life: then it came to mean "the body of those who had chosen" such an opinion, or doctrine, or way of life; *i. e.*, a school, a party, a sect; in fact, it is repeatedly rendered "sect," as in the following instances: "The sect of the Sadducees;" "The sect of the Pharisees;" "The sect of the Nazarenes;" "The most straightest sect of our religion;" "Concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against;" Paul himself, when arraigned before Felix, said: "This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy (sect), so worship I the God of my fathers." Meaning, in its earlier stages, a sect or the doctrine of a sect, it is easy to see that

Acts v. 17; xv. 5; xxiv. 5; xxvi. 5; xxviii. 22.

Acts xxiv. 14.

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in the course of time it would degenerate into a baser use, coming to mean "discord, separation, faction." This is the meaning in our text: "There must be also heresies (sects, factions) among you;" and so in the Epistle to the Galatians:

Gal. v. 19–21. "The works of the flesh are manifest, such as these; enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, heresies (factions)"; and again in Peter's second Epistle:

II Peter ii. 1. "False prophets, who shall privily bring in damnable heresies (destructive sects)." Nevertheless, the fundamental meaning of the word here translated "heresy" is school, party, sect. And this is the meaning that I shall attach to it in this sermon.

Necessity of Sects.

And now I proceed to show that, in the order of providence, sects must necessarily exist; "*There must be also heresies* (sects) *among you.*" The necessity, of course, is not absolute, but relative, growing out of our condition as finite. God's truth is so colossal and infinitely many-sided that no one man, or set of men, can survey it in its fullness and comprehend it all. Each man, or set of men, will believe only what they see; and generally speaking, they will see only what comes within the range of their birth-inheritance, or their early education, or their native temperament, or their subsequent envi-

ronment. And so, in our very make-up as human beings, differences of views must necessarily exist—a necessity recognized as long ago as Terence: "*Quot homines, tot sententiæ* (as many men, so many minds). It is as impossible for all men to think alike as it is for all men to be born in the same spot or to reach the same stature.

Mission of Sects.

But not only must sects exist: each sect, in so far as it honestly loves the truth, has a divine mission: "There must be heresies (sects) among you, *that they who are approved may be made manifest among you.*" For truth, like fire, is elicited by friction. It is through the debates of constitutional conventions that the principles of government are better understood and the liberties of the peoples advanced; it is through the collisions of scientific congresses that the riddling of false hypotheses and the establishment of true theories open up new visions of the laws and forces of nature; it is through the encounters of ecclesiastical councils, like those of Nicæa and Westminster, that crude and effete notions are struck off, and hazy guesses at truth take on definite and imposing outline; it is through the crusades of Christian sects that specific truths, otherwise latent or held in abeyance, are quickened into life, and emerge into conspicuousness and majesty.

Humanity advances along the line of conflict, unfolding its potencies under the explosive heat of battle-shock. And therefore I say that each Christian sect, in so far as it has the spirit of Christ, has a divine mission. Of course, I can not go into a detailed statement of the mission of each of the sects; I can only attempt a swift characterization, in roughest outline, of the most salient features of some of the more prominent sects. A chief distinctive mission of the Episcopal branch of the Church (I mention it first only because, as a large organized body, it is the oldest in Protestant Christendom) is, it seems to me, to give play to the worshipful side of our nature; and this it does by the prominence it gives to liturgy and the use it makes of æsthetics; and nobly is it fulfilling its devotional vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Presbyterian branch of the Church is to give play to the theological side of our nature; and this it does by the prominence it gives to creed and catechetical instruction; and nobly is it fulfilling its sturdy vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Congregational branch of the Church is to give play to the personal side of our nature; and this it does by securing to each congregation ecclesiastical independence, or the right of regulating, without external interference, the details of its own worship and discipline; and nobly is it fulfilling its manly vocation.

A chief distinctive mission of the Methodist branch of the Church is to give play to the active side of our nature; and this it does by the vigor of its ecclesiastical system, and its recognition of the lay-element in its class-meetings; and nobly is it fulfilling its robust vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Quaker branch of the Church is to give play to the meditative side of our nature; and this it does by its doctrine of the Inner Light, and by its disuse of the forms of worship; and nobly is it fulfilling its placid vocation. A chief distinctive mission of the Baptist branch of the Church is to give play to the loyal side of our nature; and this it does by demanding exact obedience to the Scriptural ordinance of baptism; and nobly is it fulfilling its stalwart vocation. Thus each of the sects has its own peculiar mission; and each, I doubt not, would be benefited by some absorption of the peculiarities of the others: we Baptists, I am sure (and this without abating one jot or tittle of our distinctive mission), would not be harmed by a little infusion of the Episcopal liturgy, the Presbyterian doctrinism, the Methodist fire, and the Quaker simplicity. And not only has God assigned to each sect of the one Church its distinctive mission: He also, in the very settlement of our country, opened up for various sects special homes: for example, He opened up Massachusetts to the Congregational-

ists, Rhode Island to the Baptists, New York to the Presbyterians, Pennsylvania to the Quakers, Virginia to the Episcopalians, Georgia to the Methodists. And let us thank God for this arrangement of His providence. Let us learn a lesson of brotherhood from God's own variety of climates, and landscapes, and trees, and races, and men; one star differing from another star in glory. Listen to a scripture exactly in point:

I Cor. xii. 4-11. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are diversities of ministrations, but the same Lord; and there are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one is given through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another, the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; and to another faith, in the same Spirit; to another, gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; to another, workings of miracles; to another, prophecy; to another, discernings of spirits; to another, divers kinds of tongues; to another, the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as He willeth."

In fact, the ideal Church comprehends all these varieties of denominational peculiarities. What is now the hobby of a particular sect will then be the common property of the whole Church. Meantime let each of us seek to hasten that day by endeavoring

Eph. iv. 3.

to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In the matter of Christian union amid denominational differences, let us seek to illustrate the golden saying of Rupertus Meldenius in the seventeenth century: "In essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity."*

Mission of the Quakers.

And now let me make mention of the specific mission of one of the Christian sects; The Society of Friends. Springing up in England about the middle of the seventeenth century, amid the fierce social and religious agitations under Cromwell and the Commonwealth; founded by that pure and heroic man of God, George Fox; seeking, not to found a new sect, but to restore primitive Christianity; bravely enduring for conscience' sake, and this literally by the thousands, confiscations and imprisonments and scourgings and banishments; sagaciously founding on the basis of human brotherhood what has become the second Commonwealth of the American Union; numbering among their ministers George Fox, among their scholars Robert Barclay, among their theologians Joseph John Gurney, among their philanthropists Isaac Tatem Hopper, among their humanitar-

* The exact language of this eirenic maxim is as follows: "*Si hos servaremus in necessarii unitatem, in non necessariis libertatem, in utrisque caritatem, optimo certe loco essent res nostræ.*

ians Elizabeth Fry, among their preachers Lucretia Coffin Mott, among their missionaries Stephen Grellet, among their statesmen William Penn, among their orators John Bright, among their poets John Greenleaf Whittier; leaving wherever they have gone the impress of a benignant and gracious example: the history of the Quakers is a story of absorbing interest. But it is not with their history that I have to do to-day; it is rather with their distinctive mission as a Christian sect, or a branch of the one true Vine. The grand distinguishing tenet of the Society of Friends is this: the Inner Light of the Spirit of God in man, as a continuous divine revelation. They hold fast the Scriptural doctrine of the Spirit in all its fullness, maintaining that His illumination is a personal, direct, perpetual inspiration. This idea underlies the whole structure of Quakerism giving the tone to its theology, the shape to its organization, the direction to its practice. For example: Does the Quaker bear his testimony against worship as a matter of place or time or form? It is in the spirit of the Master's words: "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father; the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him; God is a spirit; and

John iv. 21–24.

they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Does he bear his testimony against unalterable creeds? It is in the spirit of the Master's words: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye can not bear them now; howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth, and He will shew you things to come." Does he bear his testimony against liturgy and premeditated preaching? It is in the spirit of the Master's words: "Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye; for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost." Does he bear his testimony against Baptism and Supper as outward ordinances? It is in the spirit of the apostle's words: "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Does he bear his testimony against church music? It is in the spirit of the apostle's words: "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding, singing and making melody in the heart to the Lord." Does he bear his testimony against the exclusion of women

John xvi. 12-13.

Mark xiii. 11.

I Cor. xii. 13.

I Cor. xiv. 15; Eph. v. 19.

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from the office of preaching? It is in the spirit of the prophet's words: "It shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy." Does he bear his testimony against religious intolerance? It is in the spirit of the lawgiver's words in reply to Joshua's protest against the irregular prophesyings of Eldad and Medad in the camp: "Enviest thou for for my sake? Would God that *all* the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His spirit upon them." Does he bear his testimony against oaths? It is in the spirit of the Master's words: "Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black; but let your communication be, Yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Does he bear his testimony against quarrels? It is in the spirit of the apostle's words: "Let

Acts ii. 16-18.

Numb. xi. 26-29.

Matt. v. 34-37.

all bitterness, and wrath, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Does he bear his testimony against war? It is in the spirit of the Master's words: "Put up thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Does he bear his testimony against slavery? It is in the apostle's words: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." Does he bear his testimony against intemperance? It is in the spirit of the apostle's words: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit." Does he bear his testimony against flattering titles? It is in the spirit of the Master's words: "Be not ye called Rabbi; for One is your Master (teacher) and all ye are brethren; and call no man your father upon the earth; for One is your Father, which is in heaven; neither be ye called masters (magisters, Misters), for One is your Master, even Christ." Does he bear his testimony against pride of dress? It is in

Eph. iv. 21, 32; Col. iii. 12, 13.

Matt. xxvi. 52.

Gal. iii. 28.

Eph. v. 18.

Matt. xxiii. 8-10,

the spirit of the apostle's words: "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." In fine, does he bear his testimony against all worldliness? It is in the spirit of the apostle's words: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." And all this testimony-bearing; what is it but the human echo of the Divine Testimony-bearer Himself, even the Spirit of Truth? "It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is the truth."

I Peter iii. 3-4.

Romans xii. 2.

I. John v. 6.

This, then, is the chief distinctive mission of the Society of Friends; namely, to bear testimony to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. And a great mission it is. For it has ever been the temptation of the Church to limit, practically speaking, Christ's promise of the Spirit, as an illuminating, guiding power, to the apostolic period. True, the whole Church ever has held, and holds to-day, the doctrine of the

Spirit; but it has often held it, and even now holds it, in a sort of general, vague, weak way; whereas it is the very marrow and blood of Quakerism. It must be admitted, indeed, that the Friends, like the Montanists and Mystics who had preceded them, have sometimes abused the doctrine, pushing it to the extreme of personal infallibility. Nevertheless, their distinctive mission has been to keep Christ's blessed promise of the Spirit evermore in the foreground. "The Quaker has but one word, THE INNER LIGHT, the voice of God in the soul." And so the Society of Friends, alike in virtue of the fundamental article of their creed and the characteristic feature of their organization and practice, furnish the richest illustration of the spirituality of Christ's kingdom as set forth in Peter's description of the Church: "Ye, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Verily, it is well that there must be sects among us, in order that those who are approved may be made manifest.

I Peter ii. 5.

Such, my brethren, is the tribute which I gladly offer this day to the Quaker branch of the Church of the living God. Perhaps it is none the less acceptable because it comes from one who belongs to what the Friends were wont,

at least in former days, to call a "hireling ministry." Though they will not take off their hats to me, I will take off my hat to them. You will feel that my tribute is all the more appropriate when I recall to your memory an event in the history of our own venerable church. In 1691 William Penn and George Keith, a brilliant Quaker preacher, became involved in a controversy touching the doctrine of a real atonement. The dispute ended in the secession of Keith and his adherents, who bought a lot and built a house of worship in Second street. Keith, of course, was disowned, and subsequently became an Episcopalian. Meantime, the Baptists, having been expelled from their place of worship in Chestnut street, accepted the invitation of the Keithians to worship in their building. The result was that many of the Keithians themselves became Baptists, and, retaining for quite a while their old phraseology and dress and manners, were styled Quaker Baptists. And so the valuable property in Second street passed into the possession of the First Baptist Church, Philadelphia.* Thus wonderfully, in the province of God, do extremes meet.

Mission of William Penn.

And now, having spoken of the general mission of the Society of Friends, let me briefly allude to the specific mission of one of their greatest

* Progress of Baptist Principles, by Thomas F. Curtis; page 45.

leaders, William Penn. Not that he was faultless; far from it; he was but a man, and consequently had his share of human defects and infirmities. Nevertheless, God had given him a great mission to accomplish; and gloriously did he accomplish it. I need not, even were there time, enter into a statement of the fascinating biographical details: for they are enshrined in our patriotic memories, and have become specially familiar to us in these days of grateful commemoration. What I wish to make particularly prominent is William Penn's distinctive mission. That distinctive mission, in rough outline, was this: *To found, under guidance of the inner light, in this western hemisphere, a Christian Commonwealth, on the basis and in the spirit and for the purpose of Human Brotherhood.* This, of course, involved such fundamental principles as the following: Unity of the human race; equal rights; abolition of primogeniture; separation of Church and State; freedom of conscience; justice to the aborigines; universal peace. These majestic principles were almost entirely novel in Penn's own day, proving him to have a prophet's inspiration. Nor can I do better here than to quote the words of America's noble historian, George Bancroft:—

"This is the praise of William Penn, that, in an age which had seen a popular revolution shipwreck popular liberty among selfish factions,

which had seen Hugh Peters and Henry Vane perish by the hangman's cord and the axe; in an age when Sydney nourished the pride of patriotism rather than the sentiment of philanthropy, when Russell stood for the liberties of his order, and not for new enfranchisements, when Harrington and Shaftesbury and Locke, thought government should rest on property, Penn did not despair of humanity, and, though all history and experience denied the sovereignty of the people, dared to cherish the noble idea of man's capacity for self-government. Conscious that there was no room for its exercise in England, the pure enthusiast, like Calvin and Descartes, a voluntary exile, was come to the banks of the Delaware to institute "The Holy Experiment." (Bancroft's History of the United States; vol. II., pages 379, 380.)

The Bi-Centennial.

And meet it is for us to commemorate the majestic success of "The Holy Experiment." There have been other historic landings: the landing of Julius Cæsar on the coast of Britain, of Hengist and Horsa on the isle of Thanet, of William the Conqueror on the field of Hastings, of Cortez in the harbor of Vera Cruz, of Pizarro in the Bay of St. Matthew: these landed with shout and spear and battle-axe, to found empires of force and hate and greed. William Penn landed at the mouth of Dock Creek, with no force but that of the Inner Light, to found an empire in the name of God and for the weal of man. Fit then, is it, that we reverently commemorate his landing. And the best way to commemorate it is

by entering into his spirit. The most characteristic scene in his career, forming one of the brightest pages in American, and even human history, was when he stood unarmed under the great elm of Shackamaxon, with the sun and the river and the forest and the inner light for witnesses, and said to the dusky warriors of the primeval wilds:—

"*We are met on the broad pathway of good faith and good will: no advantage shall be taken on either side, but all shall be openness and love: I will not call you children, for parents sometimes chide their children too severely; nor brothers only, for brothers differ: the friendship between me and you I will not compare to a chain, for that the rains might rust, or the falling tree might break: we are the same as if one man's body were to be divided into two parts; we are all one flesh and blood.*"

And the dusky warriors of the primeval wilds, overcome by this evangel of peace, gave to him in token of their hearty friendship the belt of wampum, saying:—

"*We will live in love with William Penn and his children as long as the moon and sun shall endure.*"

This is the memorable scene to which the scoffing Voltaire refers when he says: "This was the only treaty between these people and the Christians which was not ratified by an oath, and which was never broken." For more

than seventy years, so long as the Quakers administered the government of Pennsylvania, the covenant of peace at the elm of Shackamaxon was never broken, the blood of not a single Quaker was ever shed by an Indian. O, my countrymen, the best tribute you can offer to the memory of William Penn is, like William Penn, to disown treachery and sword, and clasp the aboriginal children of our continent in the brotherhood of man.

Doubtless, many of us were disappointed at the failure of the project to remove the remains of William Penn from England to Philadelphia. And yet we have something better than his mere body :—

> In the delightful land which is washed by the Delaware's waters,
> Guarding in sylvan shades the name of Penn the apostle,
> Stands on the banks of its beautiful stream the city he founded ;
> There all the air is balm, and the peach is the emblem of beauty,
> And the streets still re-echo the names of the trees of the forest,
> As if they fain would appease the Dryads whose haunts they molested. (Evangeline.)

Yes, friends, we have something better than William Penn's body. This free Commonwealth, so happily called Forests of Penn or Pennsylvania, this noble town so fitly called, in the spirit of Penn, Philadelphia or Brotherly Love, this city of homes, these charitable institutions, these

flourishing churches, this heirloom of sacred character: these are William Penn's true remains. If the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places and we have a goodly heritage, it is because we are the spiritual descendants of Penn and the Pilgrims, and because Jehovah was the God of our fathers. May the God of our fathers continue to be our God! And so, instead of our fathers, shall be our children, whom, like our fathers, God will make princes in all the earth.

Psalm xvi. 6.

Psalm xlv. 16.

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